

## 4 Assessing cages through the lens of Contextual Safeguarding: A framework

This framework for assessing the safety of a cage as a social context is based on all the considerations laid out in this document, as well as the principles developed by Firmin (2020) for assessing the safety of locations.

| Theme                       | Factor                             | Key question(s) about the cage/MUGA   |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Physical & environmental    | Type                               | Which type of cage is it (see typology on p. 7-8)? How does this affect its risk profile?   |
|                             | Lighting                           | Is it well-lit and visible all-year round at all times? Do any activities take place on the cage which require better lighting in order to be safe? How would better lighting affect its usage?   |
|                             | Oversight, sound & visibility      | Is the whole of the cage visible from outside? Is it perceived as a private or public space? Where are people inside the cage visible from? How far does sound travel from it? Who can see into the cage (e.g. residents, people walking/driving by, local businesses?)   |
|                             | Location                           | Is the cage in a prominent, easily accessible location, or tucked away?   |
|                             | Condition                          | Is the cage in good physical condition? Is it well looked-after, clean and hygienic?  |
|                             | Access                             | Is the cage ever locked, or open at all times? How many entrances/exits does it have? Is it accessible for disabled people? Is it physically better-suited to certain age groups?   |
| Usage                       | Age profile                        | How often do different age groups use the cage? Do different ages mix much? Do adults use the cage, or just young people? Do different ages use it at different times?  |
|                             | Gender profile                     | How often do young people of different genders use the cage? Do different genders mix?  |
|                             | Times of usage                     | When is the cage busy and when is it empty or quiet? Is the cage being used by young people during school hours? Late at night? Do different users ever conflict over usage?  |
|                             | Users and activities               | Who uses the cage? Is it dominated by particular groups? Does anyone avoid it? Which sports and activities happen on the cage? Can more than one activity happen in the cage safely and easily? Are the activities on the cage informal and peer-led, or run by an organisation or adult? Do any risky, unsafe, exploitative or harmful activities occur on the cage? If so, how severe and frequent are they? What data exists on this from services? What data exists on risky/harmful activities from the viewpoint of young people? If so, do they happen at all times during the day and year, or just specific times? |
|                             | Peer interactions                  | Do different young people engage positively with one another on the cage? Is the cage used by established friendship groups, or is it a place where 'strangers' meet? What the dynamics between different individuals and groups who use it?  |
|                             | Residency of users                 | Do people come from far to use the cage, or is it just used by immediate locals?  |
| Stakeholders                | Young people                       | What do young people think & feel about the cage? Does it feel safe to them? Who is best-placed to positive engage the young people who use or live near to it?   |
|                             | Services                           | Which services can observe or take part in activities in the cage (e.g. youth workers, coaches, refuse collectors, housing officers, social workers, police)? Has there been any prior service engagement with the cage (e.g. due to local concerns)?   |
|                             | Responsible agencies               | Which agency owns the cage? Which agency is responsible for its upkeep?   |
|                             | Residents                          | How do residents feel about it? What are their concerns and hopes for the cage?   |
|                             | Parents                            | Do parents let their children play in the cage? When? Do they watch their children in the cage? If so, how and how often?   |
|                             | Organisations                      | Do any local organisations run activities in the cage? When and how often? Which ages and genders do they involve in this? If not happening currently, has it happened previously? Could any local organisations run new activities in the cage?  |
| Guardianship                | Potential guardians                | Is there anyone locally who does or could act as a community guardian for it? If there are guardians, how effective are they? Are they trusted locally?   |
|                             | Guardian's knowledge               | Do guardians have any understanding of safeguarding? Do they know which issues to report or refer? Do they understand consent with regard to supervision & referrals?   |
|                             | Peer guardianship                  | Do or could young people support the safety of the space in any way?  |
| Wider neighbourhood context | Facilities                         | Are there other sports facilities nearby? What condition are they in & what happens there?  |
|                             | Schools                            | Which schools are nearby? Do young people from these schools meet on the cage? Do school staff have any awareness of their students' use of the cage?   |
|                             | Local organisations                | Are there local organisations running activities for young people elsewhere in the area?  |
|                             | ASB & crime                        | Are there reported issues with ASB and crime in the local area?   |
|                             | Structural inequality and tensions | How is the area affected by forms of structural inequality such as racism or poverty? Is the area undergoing regeneration or gentrification? How do these factors influence young people using the cage, and the dynamics between them? How do these factors influence how the cage is perceived by the wider community?  |
|                             | Opportunities                      | Are there opportunities for young people in the local area (e.g. paid work or work placements, training, music or sport coaching, etc.)?  |

## **5 How can we make a cage safer?: Action planning for safer cages**

The core premise of Contextual Safeguarding is that effective work to increase the safety of children and young people cannot be restricted to addressing the risks within families or the risks affecting individuals – to build safer societies and neighbourhoods for children and young people, we have to address the risks present in all the social contexts they engage with. Making a particular context (such as a cage) significantly and sustainably safer may take considerable time and resource, and may have to involve a wide range of stakeholders. But if we are to keep our young people safe from harm, it is also entirely necessary. In this section, I outline how we can sustainably enhance the safety of cages as contexts, whilst respecting their status as community-owned assets.

### **Does there need to be statutory involvement in making cages safer? What's the threshold for this?**

Statutory agencies may or may not be involved in the process of making a cage safer. Ultimately, this is a threshold question, which depends on two key factors:

1. The severity and frequency of harm taking place (or suspected to be taking place) on the cage
2. The existing capacity in the community for coordinating measures to make the cage safer

The greater the severity and frequency of (suspected) harm in the cage, and the weaker the existing community capacity to coordinate safeguarding measures, the more substantial the grounds for statutory intervention. As Firmin (2020: 209) puts it: 'state intervention rests on whether a safeguarding partnership has a role to play in addressing the behaviour of adults or improving structural factors that could increase safety in the context. If adults and young people in localities are already willing, able and resourced to take such action, statutory coordination should be unlikely.' The Contextual Safeguarding team in Hackney have also developed a [thresholds document](#) which includes guidance on thresholds for intervention in localities.

### **Bringing people together to make a cage safer**

Whether or not there are statutory agencies involved, making a cage safer will require bringing together all the people who have any kind of interest or influence over what happens in the cage. Ideally this would include all of the stakeholders listed in the assessment framework in Chapter 4 above. If there is statutory involvement, this meeting could take the form of a 'context protection conference', as described by Firmin (2020), and outlined in the [Contextual Safeguarding Network guidance on planning context conferences](#). A more informal community meeting may work best if facilitated by a well-respected local organisation, such as a tenants' group, and could adopt many of the principles from the context conference format.

Whether through a community meeting or a more formal context protection conference, the first step for making a cage safer could be to explore all of the questions in the assessment framework in Chapter 4, as well as the Contextual Safeguarding team's broader [Neighbourhood Assessment Toolkit](#). Attendees may be confident to address many of the questions immediately, as they may have clear answers. Other questions in the assessment framework may require further investigation, observation or consultation, which could be undertaken by the attendees within a certain time period, or, if needed, may have to be undertaken by a third party.



## Example actions for making a cage safer

Once an assessment has taken place, an action plan can be discussed and drawn up for making the cage safer. The table below gives an idea of some actions which could be considered by local stakeholders and professionals within such a plan. Where possible, local residents – including young people – could be trained and paid for their work undertaking certain agreed actions, particularly when they will take considerable amounts of time and local insight. Any work to improve a community space works best when undertaken as a ‘shared project’ between local residents and professionals (muf 2004: 7), and if professionals are being paid for their part, so should residents be. Some of the actions in the table below will be more reliant than others on the involvement of statutory services. All actions would need to be discussed and agreed by all present, even if allocated to particular individuals or groups.

| Potential actions  | Who could be involved?   |
|--|--|
| Further assessing the safety of the cage over a set time period before a follow-up meeting, in order to further answer the questions in the assessment framework – this may involve structured observations, resident surveys, data analysis, consulting local schools, etc. | All attendees – specific actions for each                                |
| Training and paying local young people to audit the safety of the cage. Undertaking activities to engage local young people in principles of Contextual Safeguarding, using <a href="#">CS Network resources</a> .   | Young people; youth professionals; social care                           |
| Mapping local organisations and facilities in the surrounding area   | Council officers; youth professionals                                    |
| Analysing available data on activities in the cage   | Council officers   |
| Organising safeguarding and signposting training for existing guardians or adult users of the cage   | Social care  |
| Making physical changes (e.g. lighting, adding ‘roof’ netting, trimming hedges, adding seating, locks)   | Council officers   |
| Adding signage (e.g. with support numbers or info on local activities, guardian info)  | Council officers   |
| Timetabling guardianship activities (e.g. agreeing that certain residents will be informally overseeing activities at certain times) & agreeing a protocol to gain cage users’ consent for this & for referrals  | Residents; young people; social care                                     |
| Approaching local organisations to run activities in the cage, or local services to work in the cage (e.g. detached youth workers to include the cage in their local ‘rounds’), especially to diversify use  | Residents; social care; youth professionals                              |
| Exploring possibilities for training local older young people to run activities for younger young people, either in voluntary or paid roles  | Youth professionals; sports organisations                                |
| Planning events on the cage (e.g. BBQ, friendly sports competition) to bring together a wider group of stakeholders in an informal way, for a wider conversation and to establish broad community ownership & responsibility over the cage                                   | Could involve all kinds of stakeholders outlined in assessment framework |
| Running informal surveying activities for young people who use the cage – e.g. running activities for young people which also allow for gathering insights from young people about the cage  | Youth professionals; sports organisations                                |
| Approaching local councillors and other decision makers to lobby for refurbishment or other significant physical improvements to the cage which may carry significant cost   | Residents; young people; councillors                                     |
| Applying for funding to make physical improvements to the cage or to bring provision onto the cage   | Residents; young people; youth organisations                             |
| Approaching organisations who run activities in a different local cage, to learn from their practice   | Residents; youth professionals   |
| Inviting residents from another local neighbourhood to share how they have made their cage safer   | Residents  |

Dates and processes would need to be agreed for reviewing each action and the plan as a whole. As well as the assessment framework in Chapter 4, significant wider issues discussed or alluded to in this document may also need to be considered when discussing potential actions. For example:

- What is the value of the cage to different stakeholders? What affects this value?
- What is the right balance to strike between freedom of access and diversity of use?
- Which groups feel ownership over the cage? Can this sense of ownership be broadened?
- What changes are taking place to other local community spaces, and to the neighbourhood as a whole? How do different residents feel about these other changes?
- Who has power and influence in the estate and/or neighbourhood? What is the basis for this power? How is this power dynamic affecting the use, perception, and discussion of the cage?